

Black Lives Matter B-town 2019 Primary Questionnaire

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City Council, District 5

1. Bloomington finds itself in the midst of an affordable housing crisis. How will you ensure more affordable housing in spite of city government's mandate to maintain higher housing prices for tax revenue? Do you support density housing with priority to people of color, people making under \$30,000 a year, families with dependents, and people with disabilities? Specifically, please discuss non-student housing.

Affordable housing is indeed a serious problem in Bloomington. The new draft Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) provides clear incentives to developers for making part or all of their multi-family housing units in a project affordable to residents in two low-income brackets: Those making between 80 and 120 percent AMI (Area Median Income), and those making less than 80 percent AMI. The affordability of the units must be permanent. I support the increased density allowed as incentives in the draft UDO.

The redevelopment of the site on which IU Health/Bloomington Hospital currently sits provides a great opportunity for affordable, non-student housing. The city will soon own and control 24 acres there, meaning the city can (and should) ensure part of the property is used for housing affordable for low-income families and first-time home owners.

The city cannot prioritize housing for people of color, but we can and do provide resources for people who have suffered housing discrimination. Such complaints are investigated by the Bloomington Human Rights Commission. Through Jack Hopkins Social Service grants, the city has supported Life Designs, which provides housing for people with disabilities.

I don't believe the city government has a mandate to maintain higher housing prices for tax revenue. An increase in property values does not necessarily mean an increase in property tax revenues. An increase in net assessed property values would lead to a lower property tax rate.

2. Students of color in Bloomington experience disproportionate rates of detention, suspension, and expulsion. Please share with us any knowledge or data you have about suspension and detention rates of students of color in Bloomington. To the best of your knowledge, how does this problem contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline? Would you support a city-based initiative focused on anti-bias training for faculty, staff, and administration at MCCSC?
 - *According to the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, "black students are suspended and expelled at a rate three times greater than white students. On average, 5% of white students are suspended, compared to 16% of black students."* (<https://ocrdata.ed.gov/downloads/crdc-school-discipline-snapshot.pdf>)

I learned the above fact at the State of the Black Community event in February 2018 (and heard it again at the February 2019 event), and I agree that racial bias probably is at play here. I would like to find out what kind of implicit bias training and racial sensitivity training is currently required for MCCSC teachers and staff, and whether they use restorative justice rather than punitive (in)justice in dealing with problems involving student behavior. I would encourage more training on overcoming bias, being sensitive to different cultures and races, and utilizing restorative justice methods. I would be open to city government partnering with MCCSC on this effort. We must end the school to prison pipeline.

3. How do you define privilege? How has privilege impacted decisions you have made as an elected official, or if you are running for the first time, as an engaged community member? If you are elected, how will you use your privilege to assist black and brown communities?

Privilege encompasses the advantages that one social group has that others do not have. Privilege means access to resources and social status that is not earned but rather just goes along with being part of a group. I recognize that I have the privilege of being a white person born into a middle-class family of European ancestry. I didn't do anything to earn this privilege, I just have it.

My privilege means that I have to stop and think about the impact my decisions on the City Council may have on those with less privilege. But I believe that, upon reflection, and by talking with people from other backgrounds, I have come closer to understanding the impacts of most of my pending decisions and taken those impacts into account. If re-elected, I will continue to apply affirmative action in my decisions about whom to appoint to city boards and commissions, and I will continue to listen to people of color to try to understand and meet their needs.

4. In a "Strong Mayor" state, the Office of the Mayor has very broad administrative authority. If elected, how will you ensure that the checks and balances system is preserved, especially with respect to the budget? If the Mayor's office implements a policy that is potentially harmful to people of color, how will City Council use their authority to curb or stop this policy?

As a City Council member I have never rubber-stamped proposals coming from the mayor's administration, always asked probing questions, and never assumed the mayor's way was the only way to address an issue. Council Member Dorothy Granger and I co-authored legislation last year that requires the mayor's administration to obtain City Council approval through a public process of any proposed expenditures of \$100,000 or more that were not previously approved by the Council in a public process. This legislation came about as a result of the Bearcat armored vehicle purchase by the Bloomington Police Department earlier in the year, which did not go through any public process before the vehicle was ordered.

As to policies potentially harmful to people of color, I would convey my concerns to the mayor and facilitate a conversation between the mayor's administration, members of the black community, and the city council so that we can change the policy to bring equal justice, opportunity, and access to all. I appreciate when members of the community bring concerns to the City Council during the public comment period, and always listen and try to help with the situation.

5. To the best of your knowledge, describe why people of color are disproportionately targeted and arrested by the criminal justice system. What ideas do you have to make the justice system more equitable and impartial? What concerns do you have about the militarization of our police force? Name a specific issue in our community relating to the militarization of the police and how you have or would respond to it.

The issue of bias in the law enforcement and criminal justice system is complex, and I would welcome data to better understand the causes of bias. In addition to people of color, low-income people are disproportionately victimized by the system, and unfortunately there are disproportionately more people of color who live in poverty. Poverty is often generational, and it is often accompanied by inadequate health care (mental and physical) which leads to greater poverty and extremely difficult pathways to recovery (including from addiction).

As for making the criminal justice system more equitable, first we have to make sure that no disadvantage comes from lack of funds. So diversion programs have to be free, cash bail needs to be abolished (except perhaps in the case of serious violent crimes), and the public defender system needs to be well-funded. These are county issues in Indiana, but if I can help as a City Council member, I would be glad to do so.

As to the militarization of the police force, I think it is a problem nation-wide, and Bloomington is not immune to it. The BPD has good training programs and policies in place to focus on a "guardian" model of policing rather than a "warrior" model, but there is room for improvement. I was dismayed in February 2018 to learn that the BPD ordered a Bearcat armored vehicle without going through any public process. I learned a lot from the constituents who protested the purchase, and I decided that the purchase should be canceled due to the level of distrust in the community that resulted from the WAY it was purchased. I would have preferred a clearly civilian alternative such as a Brinks truck. As you saw by my response to item 4, I worked with Dorothy Granger to prevent such a purchase without public oversight from happening again. The City Council also passed legislation in June 2018 that amended city code to prohibit the use of the armored vehicle for the purpose of crowd control or during non-violent public demonstrations. The ordinance also prohibits firearms, water cannons, or any other device capable of launching a projectile to be added to the vehicle.

6. Would you support establishing a 311 number that connected people to emergency services and local organizations trained in handling crisis situations rather than the police? What should be done with individuals who make false reports to the police based on racial profiling or prejudice?

It seems like a good idea to have an easy emergency phone number that does NOT connect to law enforcement, but rather provides other guidance in case of an emergency. I understand that minority communities often do not want to involve law enforcement and therefore do not dial 911 even if they are in urgent need of assistance. I don't know much about the 311 option, so I would have to study this proposal, see if it works well in other cities (and how), and go from there.

The rash of incidents in which white people (mostly women) reported "crimes" that were clearly not crimes by black people to the police in the past year is horrible and, frankly, embarrassing. Embarrassment is of course a mild emotion compared to what people of color must feel. The presidency of Donald Trump has certainly contributed to white people being more open about their racism, and perhaps showing privileged people what people of color have known all along: Racism is alive and well in the USA.

Although it is already a crime to file a false police report and to lie to a police officer, it is not a crime to interpret innocent actions as threatening. Police responding to such a call should explain that there is no credible proof that a threat exists, and should ask the caller to not use 911 to report such "incidents." Furthermore, we should try to prevent such calls through education and through community activities that bring people of different races together in positive ways.

7. Describe a society in which there are no prisons. How does that justice system differ from ours? What other aspects of culture would be different in a society without prisons?

A world without prisons would be one in which we address crimes through restorative justice and peacemaking rather than through a system of punishment that does not work. The US imprisons more people per capita than any other nation, but we do not have less crime. Locking people up does not work to deter crime. Methods that have been shown to reduce crime and/or recidivism include restorative justice, access to mental health and social support services, job training, and education.

If we had fewer prisons, many other problems would be reduced as well. For example, children could grow up with their parents at home, victims could have a greater level of satisfaction and less post-traumatic stress, offenders could keep their jobs and continue to earn money to support themselves and their families, and the stigma of having a criminal conviction would be alleviated.

8. What does restorative justice look like to you? What programs focused on restorative justice do you support or would you support as an elected official? How?

Restorative justice happens when the offender, the victim, and other parties involved in a crime come together to discuss the harm caused by the crime and focus on the victim's needs. I think in the case of non-violent crimes, restorative justice programs could substitute criminal prosecution and punishment entirely, if both victim and offender are willing participants. For violent crimes, I am not sure whether restorative justice would

be sufficient, but certainly it should be part of the criminal justice process. Perhaps for some violent offenses, such as domestic violence, more intensive compulsory mental health treatment should be required for the perpetrator.

I do not know enough about restorative justice programs to indicate which ones I would support as an elected official. Locally, the criminal justice system is the domain of the county government, not the city government, although collaborations between city and county could certainly be pursued.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any further questions, or just to talk about city issues. I'm available at 812-219-2788, piedmontsmith4council@gmail.com (for campaign-related business) and piedmoni@bloomington.in.gov (for city government issues).